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The Marine Corps overcame major organizational, doctrinal, training, and personnel challenges, and thus effectively established and sustained a successful transition team program in Iraq which led to mission accomplishment. When time constraints, personnel, training, and resource challenges are taken into consideration, it can be concluded that the Marine Corps effectively developed, established, and employed its advisor program in support of OIF. Most importantly, the institutional procedures adapted to support this program are enduring; pertinent orders, doctrine, and training requirements are developed; knowledge and experience are greatly enhanced throughout the force; and dedicated resources and structure are established to meet foreign military advisory mission requirements in support of future operational demands.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: MARINE CORPS TRANSITION TEAM PROGRAM IN IRAQ:
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES
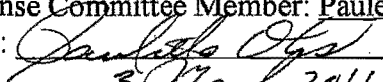
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Table of Contents

DISCLAIMER

Illustrations

Tables

Figures

Preface

During my tour at Combat Logistics Battalion-7, 1st Marine Logistics Group, I deployed to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM on a Border Transition Team (BTT) to the 2d Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2d Region (2/5/2) Iraqi border patrol unit from February – September 2008. My challenging experiences from this assignment were extremely rewarding, and the lessons that I learned about the Marine Corps and from this foreign military advisor duty are worth sharing.

Most transition team veterans would agree that a major factor that contributes to a team's success is the ability for a team to bond. This includes the ability to work closely together, overcoming friction, establishing and maintaining complete trust and confidence among all individuals, and encouraging all members to express their thoughts and ideas which facilitates unity of effort and mission accomplishment. I was fortunate to serve on BTT 2/5/2 with ten exceptional individuals who were professional, dedicated, loyal, and most of all great teammates and friends. To them- thanks for all you did for me especially during the most difficult times.

I chose to write on this important subject to show how the Marine Corps can truly adapt and overcome challenging circumstances, and to hopefully show the readers how the institution does its best to ensure Marines and sailors are set up for success. Organizing, manning, equipping, and training transition teams for duty in Iraq was a tremendous feat when all variables to establish and sustain this program are considered.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks to my wife, Alison, for her unwavering support throughout this project. Her continuous words of motivation were the driving force for me to complete this thesis, and without her dedicated assistance this accomplishment would not have been possible.

Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Transition Team Program in Iraq: Mission Accomplished

Author: Major Jeff P. Bentz, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The Marine Corps overcame major organizational, doctrinal, training, and personnel challenges, and thus effectively established and sustained a successful transition team program in Iraq which led to mission accomplishment.

Discussion: When the revised strategy for victory in Iraq was produced in 2005, the Marine Corps faced the daunting challenge to establish and support a foreign military advisory program to support the new operational requirement, which created a series of organizational, operational, and personnel concerns. Upholding its reputation, the Marine Corps quickly adapted and overcame adversity and sourced, trained, and deployed thousands of Marines and sailors who were adequately prepared for the task. Many issues were initially identified in regards to the sourcing, assignment, and pre-deployment training of the transition teams, but the significance of the issues were not detrimental to the overall success of the program.

This was the first time since Vietnam that the Marine Corps had to plan, organize, source, train, and employ large numbers of conventional advisory teams to support foreign security forces long term; therefore, organizations and procedures to accomplish these demanding tasks were non-existent. Not surprisingly, many recommendations to improve the program were identified during formal conferences, reports, and studies conducted over a three year period. The institution implemented several improvements during the life of the program, which addressed many of the program's initial shortfalls. Legitimate and valid evidence exists that depicts the transition teams were prepared for the duty; however, their overall effectiveness cannot be determined and will ultimately be dependent upon how well the ISF perform, progress, and continue to be effective in the future. It is clear from this research that advisory duty is very complex, many variables dictate success, and institutional resources and a dedicated focus of effort is required in order to implement and sustain a successful the program over time.

Conclusion: When time constraints, personnel, training, and resource challenges are taken into consideration, it can be concluded that the Marine Corps effectively developed, established, and employed its advisor program in support of OIF. Most importantly, the institutional procedures adapted to support this program are enduring; pertinent orders, doctrine, and training requirements are developed; knowledge and experience are greatly enhanced throughout the force; and dedicated resources and structure are established to meet foreign military advisory mission requirements in support of future operational demands.

INTRODUCTION

The *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq 2005* was the strategic document which provided guidance for the U.S. military to focus efforts on establishing a foreign military advisory program in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Within this new strategy was a goal to "Transition Iraq to Security Self-Reliance." In order to accomplish this task, significant efforts were required towards the training and equipping of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), military and police, so their capabilities were developed sufficiently to combat terrorist and other enemy activity, and maintain a secure environment within the country.[1] The strategic guidance to achieve victory in Iraq was clear; the U.S. military had to dedicate appropriate manpower and resources in order to effectively train, mentor, and advise the ISF to facilitate the transition of security responsibilities throughout the country to host nation forces.

During this time period Marine Corps forces were heavily engaged throughout Al Anbar Province, Iraq, and the continental U.S. (CONUS) supporting establishment focus of effort was to man, train, and equip the operating forces to meet the demands of the conflict. With the new operational requirement to train the ISF, the Marine Corps faced a daunting challenge to establish, support, and sustain a foreign military advisory mission in Iraq. This caused several organizational, training, and personnel concerns. Three major challenges included the immediate formation of "ad hoc" commands to institute, manage, and administer the transition team program; development of a pre-deployment training plan by personnel with foreign military advisory experience to prepare the transition teams for the mission; and the global sourcing of quality personnel throughout the Marine Corps to fulfill the transition team requirements during the height of the conflict. When the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq 2005* outlined the importance and need of embedded advisors to train and advise the ISF, the Marine Corps had to

1

re-prioritize efforts and allocate resources to meet this important operational requirement. The Marine Corps overcame major organizational, doctrinal, training, and personnel challenges, and thus effectively established and sustained a successful transition team program in Iraq which led to mission accomplishment.

BACKGROUND

The general composition of a Marine Corps transition team in support of OIF consisted of approximately eleven to fifteen officers and senior noncommissioned officers with military occupational specialties in ground maneuver, logistics, communications, fire support, and intelligence. Their primary mission was to train, mentor, and advise ISF in the areas of military, local and national police, and border and port of entry security operations. Moreover, Marine Corps transition teams were organized into five variations to support mission requirements: Military Transition Teams (MiTTs), Police Transition Teams (PTTs), National Police Transition Teams (NPTTs), Border Transition Teams (BTTs), and Port of Entry Transition Teams (POETTs). In order to maximize effectiveness throughout the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior ISF chains of command, teams deployed at the battalion, brigade, and division/regional levels.

The challenges to establish and support a foreign military advisory program were extensive, especially considering that no organizational structure, full time designated personnel, standing procedures, or established processes existed when the requirement was levied in 2005. Furthermore, this was a new mission assigned to conventional Marine Corps forces, so the knowledge and experience levels within the force were understandably low. Therefore, in order for the program to succeed, significant resources, a concentrated effort, and clear guidance by the institution was essential. The first critical element for success was the formation of permanent

2

organizations with competent personnel to support the administrative and training requirements for transition teams. Next, a clear and efficient process was required to source and assign quality individuals to the program without creating personnel shortfalls within the operating forces who were preparing for future combat operations. Specifically, company grade officers and staff noncommissioned officers were critical and in high demand for both missions. Finally, the institutional policies, procedures, and organizational changes developed to support the transition team program in Iraq had to be enduring in order to support current and future foreign military advisory operational requirements. The depth and complexity of the challenges were significant, but effective and successful measures were implemented to meet the demand and accomplish the mission.

SOURCING TRANSITION TEAM PERSONNEL

It is understandable why commands are reluctant to willingly provide their competent, experienced, and dedicated personnel to temporary additional duty (TAD) assignments. Major subordinate commands encountered this predicament regularly from early 2005 to the end of 2009. Personnel requirements for transition team quotas had to be sourced, and quality individuals assigned would be detached from parent commands for approximately ten to fifteen months. To better illustrate the challenge, a description of the manpower intensive requirements was provided by Major General George J. Flynn, Commanding General, Training and Education Command, during an interview conducted in the fall of 2008. The transition team requirements in Iraq were at peak levels during this timeframe.

> At any given time in Iraq, we have 46 Transition Teams operating. The breakdown is as follows: 20 MiTTs [12-365 day/eight-210 day]; 10 BTTs [two-365 day/eight-210 day]; four NPTTs [365 day]; 12 PTTs [12-210 day]; Total: 46 Transition Teams. However, if you take into account all of the 210 day teams; this is the number that actually needs to be trained every year: 12-365 day MiTTs;

3

16-210 day MiTTs; two-365 day BTTs; 16-210 day BTTs; four-365 day NPTTs; 24-210 day PTTs; for a total of 74 Iraq Transition Teams deploying per year.[2]

These personnel statistics clearly depict the manpower requirements the Marine Corps had to source for this operational demand. Using an average of thirteen members per team, this equates to 598 individuals that operated in Iraq at a given time, and 962 individuals that were sourced, trained, and deployed each year.

The struggle to source and sustain manpower for such a program lends well to the idea that newly enforced institutional requirements that potentially have a major impact on the force have strong advocates and staunch opponents based on the local effect they create. Furthermore, numerous and diverse recommendations for improvement will continuously arise. From October 2006 through September 2009 two major Transition Team Conferences, one formal compilation of reports study by Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL), and one independent research study were conducted to assess the overall effectiveness of the Marine Corps transition team program, and to make recommendations for improvement. One major area analyzed was the selection, assignment, and qualification procedures of transition team members conducted by the Marine Corps. Not surprisingly many recommendations were provided such as the implementation of a formal screening process, and some had validity with the potential to make a positive impact on the transition team program in Iraq.

The first conference was hosted by MCCLL in October 2006, and the transition team sourcing, selection, and assignment process was criticized due to the lack of priority and focus. One conference attendee argued, "The Marine Corps needs to treat the advisor mission as main effort, not just pay lip service to it."[3] According to another conference member, "We are treating the advisor program as a FAP [fleet assistance program] quota issue rather than as the

4

centerpiece of our exit strategy."[4] The report describes how the Marine Corps had not yet developed a standardized screening and selection process, and transition teams were still being formed last minute in an "ad hoc" manner. The main recommendations from this conference were to (1) identify, form, and train transition teams well in advance of deployment, (2) require a formal selection / screening process – for team leaders at a minimum, and (3) establish a long-term, formal centralized advisor program (sourcing and training).

The concern stated in the first recommendation was confirmed in an interview by MCCLL on 7 January 2006 with Colonel Joseph Osterman, 1st Iraqi Division Senior Advisor, in which he responded to a question where he stated that his team underwent three and one-half weeks of pre-deployment training in the spring of 2005; his team arrived in Iraq on 2 May 2005.[5] Colonel Osterman did not mention that the late formation of his team had a negative impact, so the first evidence that identified this as a valid requirement for the program was produced from the October 2006 conference formal report. However, the importance of this issue became very significant within the Department of Defense in December 2006 during testimony before the House Armed Services committee. Representative Vic Snyder of Arkansas, ranking Democrat on the military personnel subcommittee, had concerns about training and growing a force of foreign military trainers. He had been told the required fifty-five days of training for the trainers was not being conducted in teams and in some cases was being waived entirely.[6] The response by Lieutenant General Michael Rochelle, a senior Pentagon personnel official, said "fifty-five days is an absolute requirement, but added it was true that some teams were not training together because of problems selecting teams and filling vacancies for people who are unable to complete training after being selected."[7] The Marine Corps addressed this concern, and by November 2007 all three MEF's training programs were around ninety days long, and the goal for selection

5

notification and for manning the teams was around 120 days.[8] This illustrates the Marine Corps recognized the importance of team cohesion development and adequate pre-deployment training, which are two key aspects that facilitate mission success.

The MCCLL published *Advising Foreign Forces, A Compilation of Reports* in January 2007 in which personnel sourcing and selection issues were identified.[9] Although many recommendations were listed, the themes consistent with the conference in 2006 will be discussed to illustrate trends. At the time this report was published, the Marine Corps transition team program was approximately two years running. Once again, the lack of a screening and selection process for the duty was criticized, and the criteria was further refined.

> Advisors need to be combat veterans. They need to be mature, experienced
> people. They need to be experts in their fields (MOS) and should have performed
> the duties at the level that they are advising and mentoring. Conference attendees
> were adamant in the opinion that many of the Marines serving as advisors were
> not technically qualified or did not have sufficient experience to be advisors.
> Much of their success was based on "on-the-job" training and "can do" attitudes.
> A few quality individuals often had to make up for inexperienced team members.
> This was the result of selecting advisors from a small pool based on availability
> rather than qualification.[10]

This recommendation had merit, but the ability for the Marine Corps to screen and source nearly 1000 Marines on an annual basis that meet these criteria, and continue to meet operating forces manpower requirements was just not feasible. The operational tempo to meet OIF demands was too high, and there were just not enough qualified staff noncommissioned officers and officers with advisor experience. One solution to mitigate this problem was to enhance the training, which will be discussed later in the paper.

Another means to mitigate the problem was to attract quality individuals. The January 2007 report addressed this issue in the following manner:

> Most attendees were unsure whether their tour would be seen as career enhancing;
> several were worried that it might be a career impediment. All were adamant that

a successful advisor program needs to attract the best and brightest. Make it career enhancing, and ensure everyone knows it. A list of potential incentives could include: (1) Command tour credit for team leaders, (2) MOS tour credit, (3) Combat tour credit, (4) Extra consideration for promotion for SNCOs (like DI and recruiting tours), (5) Post advisor tour school or assignment choice.[11]

At the time this report was published there was real concern that advisor duty had no career enhancing benefit, so many quality individuals avoided it altogether and few volunteers surfaced. Additionally, commands were hesitant to offer their "best and brightest" because there was no evident advantage to the individual Marine, and the command would lose a quality individual for the next ten to fifteen months. The recommendation to attract quality individuals by offering incentives was probably feasible, and was being analyzed by the Department of Defense during 2006 according to Michael Dominguez, Principal Deputy under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. According to his testimony to the House of Armed Services committee, senior Pentagon officials were "looking hard" at an incentive package for service members to volunteer for the transition teams.[12] This was reiterated by Lieutenant General Rochelle during the same proceeding, "troops would be more interested when told this was a vital and high-profile mission that could have career rewards."[13] The Department of Defense did not follow through on the incentive-based initiative, and the Marine Corps followed suit; therefore, the overall effects on the transition team program in Iraq, both positive and negative, cannot be assessed.

The last recommendation consistent with the October 2006 conference was to establish one centralized command responsible for the sourcing and training of advisors. The current process for sourcing of personnel was being passed between the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commands on a rotational basis, not a global sourcing process organized and managed at

the institutional level. The Marine Corps recognized that the current personnel sourcing process could not be sustained and lacked effectiveness, and changes to this process were developed.

The final Transition Team Conference was held in November and December 2007, and the results were published in April 2008. The same recommendations for personnel sourcing identified in 2006 were still highly recommended in the 2008 report, specifically to establish selection criteria and screen personnel assigned to transition team duty. As stated in the report, "There was a unanimous agreement in all the conferences that not everyone is suited for transition team duty...There was a strong consensus that there needs to be a screening system for assignment to transition team duties."[14] This report took the screening requirement one step further by creating a list of attributes that are critical for a transition team member to possess. These characteristics were well defined and would have been feasible for the Marine Corps to enforce; however, screening for transition team duty was never implemented because advisory duty was considered equivalent to a traditional billet in the operating forces rather than a special duty assignment.

Another recommendation consistent since 2006 was the unanimous agreement of actively encouraging volunteers for transition team duty. This process would greatly enhance the quality and capability of the program. Unfortunately the exact opposite was occurring in I and II MEF commands. It was stated that many commanders were afraid of losing their "best and brightest" to the transition team mission, which would hinder unit capabilities, and were thus lobbying against allowing a system to encourage volunteers.[15] III MEF participants stated that their organizations encouraged volunteers, primarily because many would have to extend their III MEF tour to complete the assignment.[16] It is apparent a system to encourage volunteers for

transition team duty was never implemented by the Marine Corps despite unanimous agreement by conference participants from all three MEF's that this should be established.[17]

The last recommendation consistent over the past two years was the consensus to establish one centralized command for sourcing and training advisors. This would standardize the processes, create stability within the program, increase proficiency and competency of transition teams, and ultimately establish an advisor program to meet the operational demands of the future. The Marine Corps recognized this problem, and in September 2007 General James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, commissioned the Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG). The mission assigned to MCTAG is to organize, train, and resource advisor teams that will operate independently or augment general purpose forces.[18] Although the command will not reach its full operational capacity until 2011, a major concern with the advisor program was permanently addressed, and the institution will be postured to support foreign military advisor training missions in the future.

Selection, assignment, and qualification of transition team members was an enormous challenge for the Marine Corps. The number of personnel required for the duty was nearly 1000 on an annual basis at its peak, and the operational tempo of units deploying to OIF was still demanding. The data analyzed had consistent recommendations to improve the quality and experience of Marines assigned to advisor duty. This potentially could have been accomplished by the establishment of a formal screening process, encouragement of volunteers at the institutional level, and offering incentive-based rewards upon completion of advisor duty to attract quality individuals. The Marine Corps never implemented any of these recurring recommendations; therefore it can be concluded that the institution never reached its full potential in the assignment of its best individuals for transition team duty.

Transition Team duty was never viewed by the Marine Corps as a special duty assignment similar to recruiting, drill instructor, or Marine Security Guard. These quotas are identified, tasked, and assigned at a centralized institutional level, and the programs have a standard screening checklist created and approved by the Marine Corps. Local commands do not have the authority for screening criteria and assignment of personnel. Additionally, it can be concluded that the Marine Corps weighted command success more heavily than advisor duty. Commands had the authority to assign whomever they chose for the advisor duty quotas, and there was no checks and balance system in place to deter commands from assigning unqualified individuals. Often, newly joined, least qualified, or unsuitable personnel were assigned to transition team duty.[19] In II MEF, over 58% of officers and SNCOs assigned to TTs {transition teams} were either newly joined, or slated to leave the unit prior to its next deployment.[20] Although the selection and assignment of Marines to transition team duty lacked priority and little improvements to screen and assign quality individuals were implemented, it is difficult to assess the overall impact, if any, this had on the transition team program in Iraq. The pre-deployment training of transition teams demonstrated better focus and attention, and compensated for the personnel sourcing, screening, and assignment concerns.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT TRAINING

As previously stated, the requirement to source, train, and employ large numbers of foreign military advisory teams was not a mission requirement for conventional Marine Corps' forces prior to 2005; this mission was historically accomplished by Special Forces' units. When the strategy for OIF changed to a counterinsurgency mindset and the importance of embedded advisors was realized, the Marine Corps was not fully prepared for this challenge. The Marine Corps had no standing organizations with the mission to organize, train, and field advisor teams,

and to address all the administrative requirements associated with such a program. More importantly, the knowledge and experience base to implement an advisor program was understandably lacking. However, the Marine Corps demonstrated its ability once again to adapt and overcome by sourcing, training, and fielding multiple transition teams in spring 2005 with minimal deficiencies in the pre-deployment training.

The documented results showing the effectiveness of the pre-deployment training of the initial advisor teams can be found in an interview conducted by MCCLL with Colonel Osterman, 1st Iraqi Division Senior Advisor from May 2005 to April 2006. The organization that was responsible for the development and execution of the training package in the spring of 2005 was the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center (SCETC) aboard Quantico. The following is a description of the training that occurred during a three and one half week period:

> They were pretty long hours. Usually, we would start at about 7:30 in the morning many times not getting out until 9:00 or 10:00 at night and that was five to six days a week, so that was definitely putting as much as possible into the training package. One of the critiques of the course was that we had anywhere between 50 and 60 hours, I believe, of language training that was conducted as the last class of the day, usually in three hour blocks...I think that could have been reduced in numbers and time.[21]

Later on in the interview Colonel Osterman clarified why he believed that the language training was not required in the amounts his team was provided, and he also identified the areas in which training needed to focus.

> You need to know the basics and you need to be able to say the pleasantries, if you will. But a lot of Iraqis speak English. Anytime you have a detailed conversation you're going to have an interpreter there with you anyway so I think for the training perspective, it is probably better to focus on making sure that your knowledge base is up to speed for the kinds of things you need to get done: convoy operations, force protection issues; how to operate radios; how to operate the Blue Force Tracker; how to operate your {electronic} jamming systems; how to be intimately familiar with the weapons systems when you have malfunctions – all of those kinds of TTPs that you have to exercise every single day.[22]

The only training that Colonel Osterman identified as an area that needed improvement was cultural awareness, and he made clear in the interview that the knowledge base to conduct this type of training was "hard to come by." He also stressed the value to understand the daily routine and mindset of Iraqis, and the facets of their lives that are of extreme importance. Understanding this information is critical to be a successful advisor. Based on Osterman's interview; the compressed time to establish a transition team program; and the lack of standing organizations with experienced personnel to organize, train, and field advisor teams; it can be concluded the initial overall pre-deployment training package was sufficient for mission accomplishment, but improvements were required.

As the Marine Corps transition team program continued to develop and mature each MEF had the responsibility to field, equip, and train its respective transition teams. These "ad hoc" organizations, known as the Advisor Training Group (ATG), assumed the mission to organize, equip, train, and deploy transition teams who were successfully prepared to advise, mentor, and train the ISF. In addition, an ATG in Twentynine Palms was established in spring 2007 to provide a "MOJAVE VIPER-like" pre-deployment training package for outbound MiTTs.[23] All the organizations to manage the transition team program within the Marine Corps were established and fully operational capable within two years. The conferences, reports, and studies that occurred throughout this period until the end of 2009 depict consistent results on the overall effectiveness of the Marine Corps transition team program in Iraq.

The first formal Transition Team Lessons Learned Conference in October 2006 captured the lessons from transition teams that were deployed between November 2005 and August 2006.[24] The results published in the *Advising Foreign Forces, A Compilation of Reports*, by MCCLL on January 31, 2007, displayed very similar results.[25] The pre-deployment training

shortfalls will be analyzed in the following three areas: baseline knowledge, language, and cultural awareness. The baseline knowledge training gaps highlighted in both reports included the following: lack of preparedness and understanding of foreign military weapons; lack of proficiency with U.S. and host nation military communications assets; lack of familiarity to operate up-armor HMMWVs, and the knowledge of vehicle maintenance and recovery operations; training on the rules of engagement and escalation of force procedures tailored to the area of operations (AO) for both U.S. and host nation forces; and training on the ability to convey appropriate detainee handling procedures to the ISF. These shortfalls highlight specific topics which Colonel Osterman did not reference; however, each of these areas fall into what he referenced as "tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that you have to exercise every single day,"[26] which indicates training shortfalls did exist.

Both reports identified language capability for transition team members as crucial, but no recommendations were provided on how much language training was required. It was clear from the reports that the current language training was not sufficient. However, and more importantly, parameters for language training were established for the first time. The ideal advisor goal is operational conversational capability; the ability to read and write the {Arabic} language is less crucial.[27] A general consensus was established on how to approach the language training, so detailed improvements of the training package could be refined to meet this requirement.

The final area assessed in the pre-deployment training was cultural awareness. Colonel Osterman stressed the importance of this training during his interview, and it appeared the training conducted over one and a half years later was still insufficient. Attendees generally agreed that the majority of the cultural awareness training they received prior to deployment was rudimentary and of little value. It was either too simplistic and basic or "flat out" wrong.[28] The

following cultural awareness topics were identified in the official January 2007 report in order to improve the training.[29]

- Specific tribal systems. Tribal history and interactions within AO and relations with U.S.
- Power issues (Who has it? How did he get it?). Official and unofficial power. Key players and their agenda.
- Sheiks – Who are they? What are their positions? How did they get where they are?
- Provincial government issues.
- Military culture history. Information on the military culture within the country. Traditions and expectations.
- Specific religious and ethnic differences within the immediate AO.

Although this report identified significant training shortfalls within the cultural awareness category, specific training criteria in this area was formally published, and improvements were developed and implemented.

The next Transition Team Conference occurred in November and December 2007, and the results of the conference were published by MCCLL in April 2008.[30] The same three areas of baseline knowledge, language, and cultural awareness training will be discussed. It is important to indicate that the report stated many of the training shortfalls previously identified had been significantly improved by the MEF(s) and ATG training organizations; however, the following baseline knowledge training skills needed more focus: lack of up-armor driver training, and knowledge of vehicle maintenance procedures; more familiarity of foreign weapons; and operating and troubleshooting U.S. and foreign military communication equipment. Additionally, more baseline knowledge shortfalls were identified to include: the need for train-the-trainer training, or the need to know how to train foreign security forces; the need to teach staff functioning and planning; and the need to provide extensive training on the operations and troubleshooting of the Blue Force Tracker. Although the baseline knowledge

training shortfalls existed, there were no indications in the 2008 report that transition teams were not prepared to accomplish their mission.

Consistent training deficiencies on language and cultural awareness training can be derived from the April 2008 report; however, there was still no agreement on how much language training was necessary, although a consensus agreed that some type of immersion training at the beginning of pre-deployment training plan (PTP) was a good approach. Also, it was determined that language training was not effective a few hours a day "on your own" time or with small groups. Language training needed to be full time, and immersion training conducted for a period of several weeks. Finally, consistent with Colonel Osterman's views and previously discussed reports, the current cultural awareness training was of very little value and needed to be greatly enhanced. The following statement from the April 2008 report provides a good summary of the cultural awareness training being provided and why this training is essential for transition teams to succeed:

> Current cultural awareness training provides an incomplete picture of what a transition team member must understand to accomplish the mission is Iraq. Only covering issues such as what offends an Iraqi does not provide detailed understanding of all the key issues that shape Iraqi units. Comprehensive cultural understanding also helps build better relationships with counterparts and makes the advising piece more effective.[31]

The April 2008 report goes on to list very specific cultural awareness topics that needed to be addressed, many of which were the same issues the January 2007 report identified. The transition team program in Iraq was over three years old at the time of the April 2008 report, and the pre-deployment training was still highly scrutinized in some areas. During the first few years of formal reviews on the program, only internal evaluations and assessments were conducted by MCCLL. However, for the first time since the program's inception, an independent research

company was contracted in 2008 to analyze the preparedness and effectiveness of Marine Corps transition teams, which provided a much different perspective.

U.S. MARINE CORPS ADVISOR TRAINING IMPACT SYSTEM (MATIS)

The Interaction Research Institute (IRI), a private company, conducted a study that measured advisor preparedness and readiness to accomplish mission requirements, and to assess the overall effectiveness of Marine Corps transition teams in Iraq. The study specifically focused on I Marine Expeditionary Force sourced transition teams who deployed to OIF from October 2007 – September 2009. The MATIS was designed to provide timely and concise mission relevant feedback that could be linked to training effectiveness and mission accomplishment. This information would provide the respective MEF ATGs constructive feedback to facilitate improvements in the training and preparations of future transition teams. The purpose of the study had tremendous validity. Most importantly, the results found within the study, which was published in September 2009, provided formally collected and published quantitative and qualitative data that reflected transition team veteran's opinions and thoughts.[32]

The IRI study divided the research data into four quarters based on a chronological timeline in which sixty-two transition teams returned from Iraq between September 2008 and September 2009. The below results reflect the opinions of 649 Marines and Navy Corpsmen who were OIF transition team veterans. Table 1 shows the percentage by category of the most beneficial training. For clarification, the training conducted at Twentynine Palms was described earlier by Colonel Dengler as "'MOJAVE VIPER-like' pre-deployment training package for outbound MiTTs." MiTTs only account for a portion of the transition teams employed, so that category must be analyzed separately from the remainder of the data. The remaining data clearly indicates that language and the practical application training categories were the most beneficial

training according to nearly one third of the respondents, but these percentages must be assessed more closely.

Table 1
Most Beneficial Training for Advisory Duty

Code	Category	Q4 %[1]	Change[2]
LNG	Language	33.4	≈
SEN	Practical Application / Scenarios / Role Playing / Interaction	32.3	>
CUL	Culture	20.3	≈
29P	29 Palms	20.3	>
CON	Convoy Operations, Vehicles, Driving	13.3	>
GMP	Weapons, Marksmanship	12.7	≈
MED	Medical	9.2	≈
TAC	Tactics / Combined Ops	7.0	>
NEG	Negotiations & Mediation	5.7	<
COM	Radio / Communications	5.7	≈

Notes:
[1] Percent computed using the number that provided a verbatim comment to the question.
[2] ≈ indicates stability
> indicates increase
< indicates decrease

All the other areas listed, except culture, fall in to the category of baseline knowledge, or "all those kinds of TTPs that you have to exercise every single day" as described by Colonel Osterman. These collectively total 52.6 percent of respondents who viewed baseline knowledge categories as the most beneficial training. The assessment derived from this study indicates that baseline knowledge skills and language training significantly out-weigh the importance of cultural awareness training for advisors. This assessment is reinforced by the data reflected in Table 2.

Table 2 below shows the percentage by category of the least beneficial training. The study did not define more relevant training, so assessments cannot be derived. However, less redundancy can be explained by the pre-deployment training pipeline transition teams experienced. In short, transition teams were being cycled through three, and four for MiTTs, training venues prior to employment in theater. The initial CONUS training was conducted by the assigned MEF ATG for approximately ninety days; MiTTs also had to conduct the Twentynine Palms ATG training package. Once in Iraq, the transition teams were cycled

through a five day training course hosted by Multi-National Forces-West, and finally were mandated to attend another ten day advisor training course at the Phoenix Academy, Camp Taji, Iraq hosted by the executive agent for transition teams known as Iraq Assistance Group, a subordinate command of Multi-National Corps-Iraq. Upon completion of the three to four training venues, redundancy in certain areas did occur.

Just as the Table 1 analysis, the Twentynine Palms and more relevant and less redundant training categories will not be included. The totals for the three main training areas are as follows: language at 13.5 percent, culture at 7.4 percent, and the baseline knowledge skills a combined 23.3 percent. This indicates that baseline knowledge skills collectively were viewed as least beneficial training; however, language had the highest individual percentage, which is consistent with Colonel Osterman's views in 2005.

Table 2
Least Beneficial Training / Improvement Needed

Code	Category	Q4 %[1]	Change[2]
BI I	More Relevant & Less Redundant Training	1(?)	>
N/A	N/A, None, All was Beneficial	14.1	>
LNG	Language	13.5	≈
CMP	Weapons, Combat Marksmanship	9.8	≈
TAC	Tactics / Combined Ops	7.4	≈
CUI	Culture	7.4	>
29P	29 Palms	6.1	≈
COM	Radio / Communications	6.1	≈

Notes:
[1] Percent computed using the number that provided a verbatim comment to the question.
[2] ≈ indicates stability
 > indicates increase
 < indicates decrease.

The final training results to be analyzed are depicted in Table 3 below, which show responses for additional training desired for advisory duty. The language and culture results were 11.5 percent and 7.7 percent respectively. All the other categories, except border/police specific training and practical application, can be classified into the baseline knowledge training, which collectively total 49.4 percent. The information provided in this table reveals that specific

baseline knowledge skills were significantly deficient in the pre-deployment training for

transition teams. Colonel Osterman stated in his 2005 interview that these skills should be the

focus of training, and this concern was reiterated over the past several years at the MCCLL

Transition Team Conferences and in formal reports on the program. However, conflicting

opinions on the importance of this baseline knowledge training were surfacing. An example to

reinforce this point was provided by a junior officer in a *Marine Corps Gazette* article by First

Lieutenant Brett A. Friedman, "The training of Marine Corps transition teams as it stands now is

horribly skewed toward force protection to the detriment of the mission itself.

Counterinsurgency knowledge and cultural familiarity provide the groundwork for mission

accomplishment of an advisory team."[33] Although First Lieutenant Friedman's opinion should

not be disregarded, the only quantitative and qualitative data that depicts pre-deployment training

effectiveness was the study conducted by ISI; therefore, the data indicated that baseline

knowledge skills were beneficial, and additional training in these areas was overwhelmingly

necessary.

Table 3
Additional Training Desired for Advisory Duty

Code	Category	Q4 %[1]	Change[2]
COM	Communications, radios, etc.	12.2	>
LNG	Language	11.5	<
CON	Convoy Operations, Vehicles, Driving, Navigation	10.9	>
ISS	Iraqi Security Systems (Org, Processes, etc.)	9.6	>
SEN	Practical Application / Scenarios / Role Playing / Interaction	8.3	~
CUL	Culture	7.7	<
MIS	Mission Specific (AO, AA's, ORA's, POC's)	6.8	<
BDR	Border/Police Specific Training	5.0	>
MED	Medical	5.8	>
BIL	Billet Specific, Staff Functions/Planning	5.1	<

Notes:
[1] Percent computed using the number that provided a verbatim comment to the question
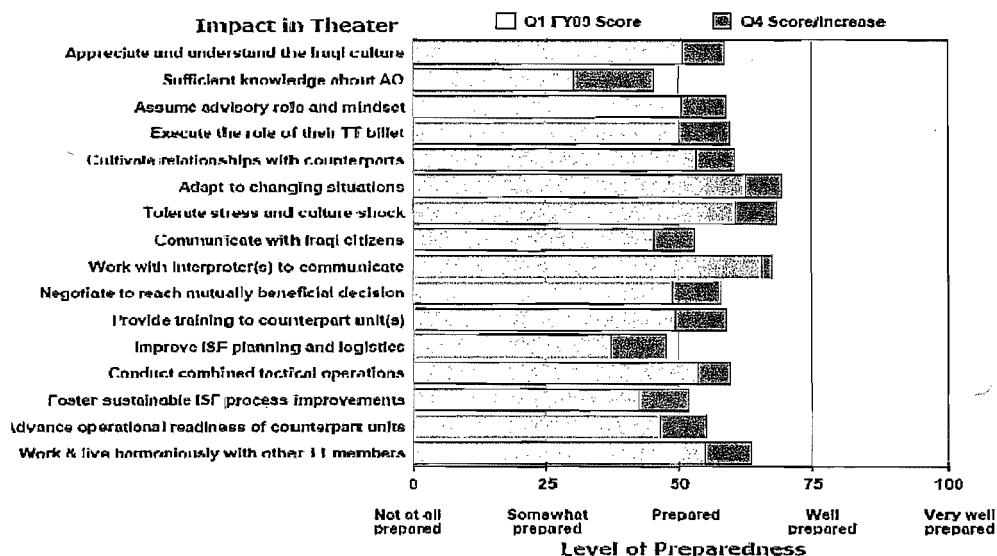[2] ~ indicates stability
> indicates increase
< indicates decrease

OVERALL PREPAREDNESS AND MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

The preponderance of Marine Corps transition teams returned from Iraq during 2009, and

the mission was completed by the summer of 2010. In over five years the Marine Corps trained

thousands of Marines for advisor duty in Iraq, and many lessons learned, recommendations, and

opinions of the program's success will be debated and critiqued. The IRI research study

attempted to address this question and produced telling results in Figure 1, but the data only

depicts a one year timeframe so the history of the program is not completely reflected. However,

transition team veterans indicated they were "prepared" for advisor duty in fourteen of sixteen

subject areas assessed, with many of the categories close to the "well prepared" mark. It can be

assumed that if a study was conducted that depicted the program from cradle to grave the same

level of increased preparedness would be reflected.

Figure 1
MATIS Score Improvement

Impact in Theater   ☐ Q1 FY09 Score   ▨ Q4 Score/Increase

- Appreciate and understand the Iraqi culture
- Sufficient knowledge about AO
- Assume advisory role and mindset
- Execute the role of their TT billet
- Cultivate relationships with counterparts
- Adapt to changing situations
- Tolerate stress and culture shock
- Communicate with Iraqi citizens
- Work with Interpreter(s) to communicate
- Negotiate to reach mutually beneficial decision
- Provide training to counterpart unit(s)
- Improve ISF planning and logistics
- Conduct combined tactical operations
- Foster sustainable ISF process improvements
- Advance operational readiness of counterpart units
- Work & live harmoniously with other TT members

0   25   50   75   100

Not at all prepared   Somewhat prepared   Prepared   Well prepared   Very well prepared

Level of Preparedness

Finally and in accordance with Marine Corps culture and standards, was the absolute

metric of success, mission accomplishment, achieved with the OIF transition team program?

This measurement can be assessed in two ways. First, attacks in Al Anbar Province remained

20

consistent at only one per day from October 2009 through March 2010.[34] Additionally, over 90

percent of Iraq civilians who reside in Al Anbar Province consider their local area "calm."[35]

These two facts combined demonstrate the effectiveness of the ISF within Al Anbar Province,

who had been trained, mentored, and advised by Marine Corps transition teams over the past five

years. Secondly, the last Marine Corps military transition team returned from Iraq on 6 August

2010.[36] This illustrates that all ISF units were deemed competent and capable of conducting

independent security operations, and no longer required training and advising. However,

ultimate success will be dependent upon how well the ISF, specifically units trained, mentored,

and advised by Marine Corps transition teams, perform, progress, and continue to be effective in

the future.

The ISI research depicted good indications of barriers to mission accomplishment, which

directly reflect the quality of training and preparations provided to the advisors prior to the

execution of their duties.

Table 4
Barriers to Mission Accomplishment

Code	Category	Q4 %[1]	Change[2]
TEM	Team Dynamics, Structure, Personnel	18.2	<
COF	Coalition Force Coordination, Collaboration & Support	17.5	≈
MIS	Mission Clarity & Viability	15.4	>
IRC	Iraqi Culture & ISF Mindset	14.7	<
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Preparedness	13.3	≈
ISS	Iraqi Security Systems, Organization & Processes	10.5	≈
POL	Policy & Current Situation in Theater (SOFA, ROE, etc.)	10.5	>
LNG	Language Barrier	5.6	≈
MAT	Material, Equipment, Supplies, Maintenance	5.6	≈
N/A	N/A, No Major Problems	2.3	<

Notes:
[1] Percent computed using the number that provided a verbatim comment to the question.
[2] ≈ indicates stability
\> indicates increase
< indicates decrease

The study did not establish parameters of acceptable percentage levels within these categories,

and whether or not the data indicates mission accomplishment; the institution must interpret the

data and make its own determination. What is clear is that advisor duty is very complex, many

variables dictate success, and institutional resources and a dedicated focus of effort is required in order to implement and sustain a successful advisory program.

CONCLUSION

When OIF changed to a counterinsurgency strategy in late 2004, the U.S. military, and Marine Corps, faced the requirement to provide large numbers of embedded advisors to facilitate this process. As First Lieutenant Friedman eloquently stated, "Unfortunately, this is not the first time the U.S. military has been caught with its trousers down by a large need for embedded advisors."[37] The Marine Corps had not performed this type of mission with conventional forces since Vietnam, so the institution had no organization or support structure in place to meet this demand. However, the Marine Corps upheld its reputation, adapted and overcame adversity, and achieved every requirement it was assigned to support the mission. Just as any newly implemented program, it had shortcomings initially, but many lessons were learned and permanent improvements were implemented.

Three major areas of concern have been addressed from lessons learned to posture the institution for a successful future foreign military advisory program. First, a centralized command was established, MCTAG, in order to organize, train, and resource advisor teams in the future. Second, all Marine (ALMAR) message 046/07 was published in October 2007 to eliminate misconceptions that advisor duty was a career detriment, and is weighted equally to traditional billets in the operating forces. Finally, Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 3-33.8A, *Advising*, was published in September 2009. This multi-service reference standardized advisor TTPs, and provides excellent instructions and guidance on how to be an advisor.

Several conferences and reports were conducted during the program's life to assess and provide recommendations for the program; however, general conclusions made by a consensus

of select individuals were the published results. The ISI research study provided qualitative and quantitative results that reflected a large sampling of OIF transition team veteran's thoughts. The overwhelming majority agreed that the program prepared them for advisory duty in Iraq. When time constraints, personnel, training, and resource challenges are taken into consideration, it can be concluded that the Marine Corps effectively developed, established, and employed its advisor program in support of OIF. There are three major reasons to support this conclusion: the program was universally accepted and supported from inception; professional and competent foreign military advisory training commands were quickly established; and required organizational and procedural measures were implemented to support the operational requirement. Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative data exists that clearly indicates the transition teams were effectively prepared for mission accomplishment, and valuable experiences and lessons learned provide the foundation for future success of transition teams. Finally, the institutional procedures adapted to support this program are enduring; pertinent orders, doctrine, and training requirements are developed; knowledge and experience are greatly enhanced throughout the force; and dedicated resources and structure are established to meet foreign military advisory mission requirements in support of future operational demands.

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